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POSTS FOR FRAUD PREVENTION MANAGERS  
FRANKFURT FOR RCO

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SUBJECT: Fraud Summary - Chisinau: March 2009 -  
September 2009

REF: (A) CHISINAU 723, (B) CHISINAU 721

1A. COUNTRY CONDITIONS:

Before its forced annexation into the Soviet Union in 1940, Moldova was part of Romania for 21 years, and hence enjoyed close ties to the rest of Europe. Those historical ties, and the ability of many Moldovans to quickly learn Romance languages similar to their native Romanian, have made it possible for hundreds of thousands of Moldovans--between 25% and 40% of the working-age population, according to some estimates--to live and work in Western Europe, particularly in Italy, Spain and Portugal. Most Moldovans also speak Russian and many more work in Russia. Although Moldova's per capita GDP has more than doubled in the last five years, the current international financial crisis has caused a sharp contraction in the Moldovan economy as remittances from those working abroad declined significantly. Business and investment suffer because of corruption, excessive bureaucracy and official interference. Many public services, particularly health care, are being overwhelmed by the combined impact of budgetary constraints and an aging population.

Moldovan passports are considered secure, although most other documents provided by visa applicants are unreliable. School or university diplomas, drivers' licenses, and employment booklets can be purchased on the local market. False documents are available from some Moldovan officials. Local firms advertise visa assistance services in newspapers and help applicants secure letters of invitation and prepare documents.

Moldova's law enforcement and judicial systems are under-funded, poorly trained, and often corrupt, and they lack public support and credibility. EU and U.S. training assistance efforts have helped the host government revise legislation, improve effectiveness, and increase transparency and accountability. However, criminal prosecution of document and passport fraud is very limited in Moldova.

A separatist regime controls a narrow strip of land in the Transnistria region of eastern Moldova. Many Transnistrian companies are not legally registered with Moldovan authorities and operate in contravention of Moldovan law.

Verification of work and travel documents from this area is extremely difficult. Residents of Transnistria frequently hold Russian or Ukrainian passports in lieu of Moldovan passports.

Chisinau is a medium fraud post.

#### B. NONIMMIGRANT VISA FRAUD:

B-1/B-2: Moldova's weak economic condition and lack of criminal prosecution are the main factors contributing to NIV fraud. Most Moldovan citizens who commit NIV fraud do so to travel to the United States to work illegally. Their destinations are usually the larger Moldovan refugee communities, most commonly in and around Sacramento, CA; Portland OR; Tacoma, Spokane, and Vancouver, WA; and Asheville, NC. Others attempt to go to Russian-speaking communities in Brooklyn, NY, or Los Angeles, CA. Given the large disparity between wages in Moldova and the United States (in Moldova, professionals normally earn monthly salaries between USD 200-500, and construction workers usually earn up to around USD 500 monthly), many applicants are willing to pay hundreds and even thousands of dollars for forged documents to support their case for an NIV.

Post has observed that most applicants using fraudulent documents to obtain visas are between 18 and 35 years of age, but many older Moldovan citizens also try to work illegally in the U.S. Post regularly sees forged invitation letters and

has provided spot reporting of this phenomenon (REF A). Applicants in the above categories normally are dispatched through INA 214(b) refusals.

Post also recently conducted a study of travel patterns for people over 60 (REF B). The study showed that only 5.2% of travelers over 60 overstayed or adjusted status.

Many NIV applicants are sponsored by churches and religious organizations in the United States, usually to visit communities with large Moldovan refugee communities. Post has detected some fraud or abuse of visas by applicants in that category.

In the past year post has seen several applicants planning to attend intensive English language training programs, most often in New York City. The applicants claim to have located the U.S. schools and applied for SEVIS without the aid of middlemen. However, searches of SEVIS by school and nationality show that groups of applicants attending the same school enter SEVIS at the same time, frequently on the same day. The improbability that they are acting independently, usually combined with unrealistic expenses and weak social and work ties, result in INA 214(b) refusals. With the assistance of CA/VO/FP, post is currently investigating the travel patterns of ESL students for one of the schools involved in this phenomenon.

J-1 Trainees and Interns: Post continues to see ostensible J-1 training and intern programs for hotel housekeeping, food and beverage, fast food restaurant workers, farm, viniculture, and other unskilled labor positions. Many of these applicants are former Summer Work and Travel (SWT) program participants who have recently graduated from university and face poor employment prospects in Moldova.

Adjustment of Status in the United States: Post

has identified several institutions that have many Moldovans on their student rolls, all or most of who have applied for their I-20s or DS-2019s while already in the United States on a B-1/B-2 or J-1 visa. Whenever post receives an F-1 application at post from an unfamiliar institution, we search SEVIS using the school name and the Moldovan country code. We now routinely run results of ADIS searches that indicate an individual has applied for a change of status to F-1 or J-1 through SEVIS to spot schools hosting other visa holders who have failed to return to Moldova.

#### C. IV FRAUD:

Immigrant Visas for Moldovas are processed in Bucharest. Post takes occasional I-130 petitions and processes I-604 (Request for and Report on Overseas Orphan Investigation) for international adoption cases originating from Moldova. We have not seen suspect I-130 petitions during the reporting period.

#### D. DV FRAUD:

Embassy Bucharest processes all DV applications for Moldovan citizens. On occasion Bucharest requests assistance with checking the legitimacy of Moldovan documents, usually diplomas, with local authorities. Post has confirmed several fake diplomas submitted by Moldovan applicants to Embassy Bucharest. Post has been contacted by a few Moldovans who have had their winning DV entries intercepted and held by the companies that submitted their entries. The applicants then have to pay the companies USD 1,200-1,400 to receive their winning applications.

#### E. ACS AND U.S. PASSPORT FRAUD:

Chisinau has not encountered incidents of U.S.

passport and citizenship fraud during the reporting period.

#### F. ADOPTION FRAUD:

As noted above, Chisinau does not process IV cases, but it does process I-604 overseas orphan investigation requests. Local authorities have ceased any activity on international adoptions, and post has not encountered a suspect or fraudulent adoption.

#### G. USE OF DNA TESTING:

Post has not employed DNA testing.

#### H. ASYLUM AND OTHER DHS BENEFIT FRAUD:

Chisinau has not seen direct evidence of asylum cases or DHS benefits fraud. We see fewer than five lost I-551s per year. However, post notes that a large number of NIV applicants traveling to visit "refugee" relatives indicate that their relative emigrated for reasons other than credible fear of persecution. When asked why they thought their relatives applied for refugee status, visa applicants commonly refer to abuses that occurred in the Soviet period. Many of these refugees return regularly to Moldova for family visits. Communities with large refugee populations are also primary sources of suspect invitations for NIV applicants.

#### I. ALIEN SMUGGLING, TRAFFICKING, ORGANIZED CRIME, AND TERRORIST TRAVEL:

While we are aware of reported trafficking of Moldovans to Turkey, Western Europe, and other former Soviet states, post has seen little evidence of transit to the United States. We are not aware of the production in Moldova of false U.S. travel documents.

The RSO has cultivated an excellent relationship with local law enforcement officials. Based on their information, we have entered the identities of nearly two hundred known and suspected Moldovan organized crime figures into CLASS. Post has no indication of terrorist travel from Moldova.

J. DS CRIMINAL FRAUD INVESTIGATIONS:

The Consular Section referred one case (REF A) to RSO for investigation and will report on any developments.

K. HOST COUNTRY PASSPORT, IDENTITY DOCUMENTS, AND CIVIL REGISTRY:

Host country identification documents are of high quality and considered secure. Post has not detected a false Moldovan passport, but is aware of a recent case in which Government of Moldova authorities detected a genuine passport issued with fake supporting documentation. Moldova began issuing biometric passports in March, 2008. Regular-issue Moldovan passports are machine-readable and those manufactured after June 2005 contain a digitalized photo.

The host government authorizes the simultaneous possession of two valid tourist passports. Moldova issues machine-readable official and diplomatic passports with digitalized photos. Older versions still in service are not machine-readable and contain laminated photos. Regular Moldovan passports cost USD 12 and can be obtained in one month; however, for a USD 100 expediting fee, a Moldovan passport can be ordered and received in one day. Applicants for passports must present birth certificates, proof of identification, and in the case of university graduates, diplomas.

L. COOPERATION WITH HOST GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES:

The Consular Section has an active relationship with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration. As noted above, the RSO maintains excellent relations with host government law enforcement, including its Center for Combating Economic Crime and Corruption and the Center for Combating Trafficking in Persons. The Ministry of Education and the General Department of Civil Records are reliable sources when we seek to verify educational, marriage, and birth records.

M. AREAS OF PARTICULAR CONCERN:

With several thousand Moldovan students recently participating in Summer Work and Travel program jobs in the United States, Chisinau is concerned about the use of "facilitators" for immigration attorneys. These facilitators advertise attorneys' services to assist Moldovans in the United States to adjust status to F-1 or H2B with USCIS in order to prolong their stays. In the past two years, according to ADIS data, more than 1,000 Moldovan SWT participants (10% of the total) sought to adjust status in the United States. This rate of adjustments of status strikes us as higher than expected.

1N. STAFFING AND TRAINING:

Chisinau has two full-time consular officers. Consul and FPM Richard W. Roesing attended fraud prevention training at FSI in 2007. The LES Fraud Prevention Assistant attended fraud prevention training at FSI in 2009.

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